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C O N F I D E N T I A L DUSHANBE 000016

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: RUSSIA PLEASED WITH BILATERAL RELATIONS WITH TAJIKISTAN

REF: 05 DUSHANBE 2097

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REASON: 1.4 (d)

1. (C) The year 2005 was very fruitful for Russia in Tajikistan, according to the Russian DCM Viacheslav Svetlichny. He highlighted the realization of long-standing commitments, particularly those made by President Putin in October 2004 to withdraw Russian border forces and increase economic assistance to Tajikistan. In 75-minute meeting with the Chargin and Poloff, he elaborated on Russia's diplomatic achievements, its commercial and cultural interests in Tajikistan and Tajik-Uzbek friction.

2. (C) Hydropower represents a big future for Russian investment, particularly the Rogun and Sangtuda power plants. Svetlichny agreed Sangtuda could domestic fuel aluminum production while Rogun's power could be exported. He gave no reason the U.S. firm AES could not play a role in the Rogun project, particularly the construction of transmission lines. In addition to hydro projects, the Russians were pleased with turnout at the Russian Exposition in Dushanbe in December, noting almost 50 Russian companies had participated.

3. (C) In the past two years, the increased number of high-level visits, and cultural and educational exchanges has strengthened Russian-Tajik ties. In addition to Putin's 2004 visit to Dushanbe, Svetlichny gave the examples of Russian Prime Minister Frattkov's October 2005 visit and President Rahmonov's visit to Russia for the "Days of Tajik Culture" exhibit in St. Petersburg as examples of intensified cooperation.

4. (SBU) Chargin outlined U.S. assistance and the shift from humanitarian aid to an emphasis on business and social development.

5. (C) Svetlichny characterized the situation in Uzbekistan as "positive and negative," but argued the new Russian-Uzbek bilateral defense agreement gave the Russians more influence over Uzbekistan. Central Asia is one of the few regions in the world that does not have strong anti-American sentiment, he noted. "We support your work here," he said. On the border, Svetlichny agreed the United States and Russia should cooperate to help secure the Afghan-Tajik border to stem the flow of narcotics. (NOTE: The Russian press continues to criticize Tajikistan's ability to control the border and suggests Tajikistan and Russia would be better off with a return of Russian border guards. The Tajiks consider the reporting "slander." END NOTE)

6. (SBU) Svetlichny invited Chargin and Poloff to the Russian-sponsored "Diplomats' Day" scheduled for February 10.

7. (C) COMMENT: Svetlichny requested the meeting, his first lengthy interaction with the Embassy since his arrival in October 2005. At receptions and conferences, he often engages U.S. diplomats, and during the meeting, expressed his appreciation and admiration of Ambassador Headland's regular ambassadorial get-togethers, suggesting it would be useful to replicate the diplomatic interaction on a working level. Russia's pride in the success of its increased cultural exchanges is further evidence of the Tajik's thirst for contact outside Central Asia. At a conference on Central Asian Security December 23, Svetlichny noted that Russia had ignored Central Asia in the 1990s, but was now intensifying its efforts (reftel). His comments then and in this meeting highlight the Russian strategy to pull Tajikistan back into Moscow's orbit.

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